DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 404 327 SP 037 158

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TITLE Limited Democracy: Voice and Choice in the Language Methods Class.
PUB DATE Nov 96
NOTE 20p.; Roundtable presentation at the Annual Meeting of the National Council of Teachers of English (Chicago, IL, November 23, 1996).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Classroom Techniques; Elementary Secondary Education; Higher Education; *Language Arts; *Methods Courses; Preservice Teacher Education; *Reflective Teaching; Theory Practice Relationship
IDENTIFIERS *Reflective Practice

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses "Doing Theory in the Methods Class: Focused Reflection," a chapter from the book "Whole Language Voices in Teacher Education" edited by Kathryn F. Whitmore and Yetta Goodman. The book chapter focuses on guided classroom reflection as a key element in the education of preservice teachers, exploring whether teacher educators demonstrate reflective practice in their courses. Two aspects of teacher education courses in language arts specifically designed to demonstrate reflective strategies for teaching and learning are discussed: the literature on reflectivity in learning, and course overviews and their relation to data collection and analysis. Then, the emergent themes in those data and implications for reflective teacher education are examined. The paper also looks at some new aspects of course reflection which have contributed to greater ownership of the courses by students; critical feedback for the professor; immediate negotiation of course content/methods; increased opportunities for voice and choice among students; and outstanding course evaluations. Two appendixes provide a set of protocols for reflection strategies and a sample feedback sheet. (Contains 21 references.) (ND)

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ED 404 327

"Limited Democracy: Voice and Choice in the Language Methods Class"

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Whole Language Voices in Teacher Education
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Stenhouse Publishers (1996)

Roundtable Topic/Chapter:
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A roundtable presentation for National Conference of Teachers of English
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CS 217158

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In the book chapter cited above (Andrews, 1996), I focus on guided classroom reflection as a key element in the education of preservice teachers. I asked the question: Are teacher educators *demonstrating* reflective practice in their courses? The following quotation from Stephanie, a preservice teacher in one of our methods courses, demonstrated that her instructional history in teacher education had done little to involve her in actively reflecting on her own learning. In one of my courses, she was required to engage in reflective learning strategies for the first time. In an interview at the end of the course, she said,

> Education is definitely the **safest** area I've ever been in. You can **go slow** or **keep quiet** in the background. But it was much more risky in this class and it made me a bigger risk-taker in my other classes. At first I was really intimidated. I didn't want to talk because I didn't know how I felt or what I believed. So much more was expected of me in this class. It made me go home and think about so many things I would have **closed my eyes** to. You can definitely **avoid thinking** about things in a regular [college] classroom setting. . . . .(Week 16).

Be safe, keep quiet, go slow, close your eyes, avoid thinking. Stephanie's descriptive phrases about "most education courses" are powerful testimony to the often deadening effects of undergraduate teaching. Unpacking these phrases now leads me to reflect on my recent focus: *democratic teaching*. Since my own reflecting on the course Stephanie took with me and the writing of the paragraph above, I have been engaged in actively learning about and practicing what I now think of as "democratic teaching." Reflection on learning processes and events is still very much a part of my teaching work, but I have moved toward a more pervasive engagement of students in the curriculum. "Limited democracy" (Yes, limited--they didn't elected me teacher nor did they choose all of the content and methods of my courses) in my classroom is the result of three simple strategies that seem in one sense to be peripheral to the business of language arts or reading. The opportunities in my classes to "be safe, go slow, close your eyes, avoid thinking" are now even more drastically reduced. While the need for more reflective teachers has been widely discussed in literature, (Bullough, 1989; Cruickshank, 1987; Gore, 1987; Smyth, 1989; Wildman and Niles, 1987; Zeichner, 1987; Zeichner and Liston, 1987) there was little actual description of the reflective classroom practices which might produce

such teachers. And, according to Nolan and Huber (1989) and Kennedy (1989), little was known about the processes that might encourage reflective practice among pre- and inservice teachers. The field is developing a reasonably solid base in the literature for the claim that reflection is a key to improving our teaching and our connections with the profession (Schon, 1991; Newman, 1991) In the book chapter we discussed aspects of two teacher education courses in language arts specifically designed to demonstrate reflective strategies for teaching and learning. First, we discussed the literature on reflectivity in learning. Second, we gave course overviews and their relation to data collection and analysis. Third, we discussed the emergent themes in that data and the implications for reflective teacher education. Attached to this reflection on the book chapter are some protocols for the reflection strategies in the chapter. (See Appendix A items). In addition, I will discuss some new aspects of course reflection which have contributed to: 1) greater ownership of the courses by students, 2) critical feedback for the professor, 3) immediate negotiation of course content/methods, and 4) increased opportunities for voice and choice among students, and, as a bonus for me, 5) outstanding course evaluations. I note here that it is possible to have a very "reflective" course and still give students relatively little voice or choice

in the classroom agenda/ materials/methods. The "new" strategies not mentioned in the book chapter, increase the level of democracy in the college classroom and provide means for hearing more voices to the end that the course is modified and shaped by those voices.

The status quo: Be safe, keep quiet, go slow, close your eyes, avoid thinking. Stephanie's statements about safety in her education courses imply that safety resides in not being noticed, questioned, or made to defend your beliefs. We were taking steps during the writing of the book to ensure that students felt comfortable speaking out--some of the reflection strategies aided that goal. However, there are always students who for reasons of shyness, lack of preparation, lack of commitment, or unwillingness to take a stand do not participate in classes. Subsequent to the writing of the chapter, I have instituted **daily feedback sheets**, **town meetings** and **"Adventures"** (team building strategies) as the result of my participation in a National Endowment for the Humanities grant on the "Foundations of Democracy in Public Schools: Building a Pedagogy of Pluralism." The challenge there was for 36 K-12 teachers and 11 university faculty members to "do democracy" in the classroom while learning about our democratic heritage through a multidisciplinary humanities course. Democratic action emerged (a most

descriptive word) through our struggles to live together for three weeks of 8-hour days. The "Adventures" (such as are often done in "Outward Bound," "ropes course" and other team events set the tone of trust and cooperation. The "daily feedback sheets" came about as a result of the need for everyone to feel that they had a voice and for the core faculty in the summer institute to "take the temperature" of the group. What emerged from those feedback sheets was a daily "town meeting" in which the whole group "processed" the feedback and decided on how to solve problems and create new opportunities for learning. I now use these, in addition to the reflective strategies in the book chapter (highlighted in Appendix A) in my classes regularly. Some results in the way of course evaluations are found below. Appendix B is a sample of a "feedback" sheet.

COURSE SPECIFIC EVALUATION

1. WHAT DID YOU LEARN THAT WAS IMPORTANT TO <u>YOUR</u> TEACHING?

•The importance of setting up a democratic classroom, and identifying values to teach in the classroom.
•Importance of sharing personal stories for children to relate value to everyday life.
•I learned that sometimes I am a "benevolent dictator" and need to give my students more choices. On the other hand, I did realize that I do offer many choices in my classroom.
•I learned that values are very important to include in my classroom. I will also try to be a more democratic teacher, using town meeting to include the students in the classroom.
•I'm looking forward to creating a more democratic classroom. I learned so many different strategies & ways to implement the process/idea into my classroom.
•Ways of teaching values in the classroom. Adventures.
•That it is good to give children choices. It makes them feel a sense of ownership and pride.
•I feel I have a better insight on asking better questions. I also fee I've been the center of attention too often in my classroom. I'm eager, yet a little apprehensive to try to conduct a more democratic classroom this fall.
•I will be using a literature based reading program this year for the first time. I feel less

insecure after this class. I see the uses of children's literature much broader. Now I will expand the opportunities for student choices in my class. Values will be the foundation of our classroom life.

•I learned how to manage a democratic classroom. How to set-up the class so that students may express their ideas. I learned to value my teaching.

2. WHAT DID YOU LEARN ABOUT DEMOCRATIC EDUCATION?

•The importance of setting up a democratic classroom for students who will soon be adults in a democratic society.

•Choice-Inquire; I didn't sign up for a class on democracy so this was not what I expected.

•I now feel that kids will learn as well or better if they are given more voice in their education. I am going to let the children choose one unit towards the end of the year to study (after they have more skills) & see how it goes.

•I learned that this type of education can be a reality in my classroom and make a world of difference. I learned that it is feasible.

•It is so important to allow students to have a say in their education. They really need to be a part of the decision-making process.

•It sounds fun for the students & I believe my grade level will be able to handle this in a positive way. Hopefully, it will teach them many values they didn't realize were important to them.

•How to add democratic choices to my own classroom.

•You must build a warm and trusting environment. The students must feel free to share their ideas.

•To be democratic need practice in it; to be a critical thinker, need opportunity to make choices/decisions; one of goals of education (instill principles & values of a democracy in students) seems to have become watered down.

•I learned that in a classroom, a "democracy" can be set up which would probably improve the learning situation. If the students have more voice in such issues as class rules and what topics to be studied, they will be more apt to feel a part of the learning process and want to "go for it" more. Also if they have a say in such matters as how and when to be tested, they would respond more positively.

•Student really do need a voice. Donna's classroom was quite an inspiration.

•This is possible at all levels of educating students. I have allowed my students limited choices in the past, but will definitely expand this, and will strive for a classroom where we all feel welcome & comfortable.

•Students need to have a voice in the classroom; give up control might help student's accept responsibility; the more choices students have the more they feel it is their classroom.

3. WHAT DID YOU LIKE ABOUT THE STRUCTURE OF THE WORKSHOP?

•I liked the opportunity to set up the class from the beginning and receive objectives from the first. The town meetings were great tools for voicing opinions and for sharing. It was great being able to have the opportunity to get the lesson plans from the other classmates.

•Quizzes over 2nd week

•I loved the adventures. I think it really helped us bond as a group. I also liked the ability to

take group quizzes and work in pairs or groups.

- I liked the democratic structure in which we could make decisions together and discuss concerns in comfortable atmosphere. The teacher was really able to help us because we felt free to tell her our needs.
- It was a more relaxed atmosphere where I felt free to say what was on my mind. I truly enjoyed having a say in our daily plans. It really made me feel like a part f the class.
- It was a very relaxed atmosphere - no set structure - so that if a conversation went on beyond the expected time period (which it usually did!) that was ok!
- It was open & relaxed. I liked being able to check out the books.
- I loved the adventures! They were great ice breakers. The town meetings were also very helpful.
- I liked the informal atmosphere and Dr. Andrews efforts to build a good class rapport. I liked that we knew what work we were to do and the assignments made clear (& useful)!
- I would have liked more specific guidelines at the beginning of the class - as to what was expected and when. I like being given a schedule of the class - although I did get is straightened out. I like to be organized and know exactly what's going to happen and when. It did get better a the days went on!
- At first it was uncomfortable being "in charge." I learned to love the town meetings. I'm ready to try it in my classroom!
- We were given a voice and we were heard. We shared in all aspects of class.
- I liked being able to express our thoughts and ideas. Also, it gave us free flowing discussion. I thought it was great how Sharon listen to us and our questions. I liked the lesson plans once they were completed.

OTHER:

- The adventures were a great way for the class to bond and become "classmates." They should be included in all undergrad & grad classes! Have class in an warmer room!!
- Thank you for giving us three test and not five test.
- Enjoyed library-old book study. Special opportunity. Need a warmer room. Can't work or think when freezing.
- Warmer room!!
- I am leaving this class with plans I not only "can" or "might" use but that I will use in my classroom. The time spent in the class was worthwhile and productive. This class excited me, inspired me, and I really enjoyed it.
- I did enjoy the class but it wasn't quite what I expected. I enjoyed getting the copies of others lesson plans.
- Warmer room!
- I enjoyed the class. I feel it has really been worth my time and effort. I'm leaving this class with many plans that I can use in my teaching from here on out - Great!

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Appendix A

NIGHTMARES IN MY CLOSET

Sharon Andrews
1987

In-Process Journals

1. Students work in teams.

2. Assignments (structured or unstructured, instructor or student initiated) are worked on in teams.

3. Instructors circulate with journal in hand.

4. Instructors receive and record audience talk:

student dialogue

student strategies

students theoretical demonstrations

5. Instructors give feedback, illustrating students interactions as they apply to strategies, social learning theoretical concerns.

6. Instructors use replay journal to plan next steps, answer questions, negotiate curriculum with students.

Reflective Questioning
Reading/Writing Specific

•Why are we doing this?

•Why is this important?

•How does your experience here influence what you do in your classroom?

•Did you have a topic in mind to write about before you came today?

•Did you think about the writing you would do in class while you were not here?

•What does this tell you about how you learn?

•How did you choose the topic you wrote about?
(Discussion follows which prompts them to think about how they selected a topic. This strategy is repeated periodically because the learners' strategies in choosing topics will change and evolve.)

•Looking at your drafts, what can you learn about how you write?

•Did you make some changes while you worked on your first draft?

•For you as a writer is revision a continuous process?

•Did you learn something or clarify something you did not know you knew so clearly until you discovered it through writing (Murray, 1984)?

•How did audience response influence your thinking?

•Did you consider revising your piece?

•Why did you decide to add or change something?

•As a participant in a "community of learners," are you sensing that some of your interests and strengths are being identified and affirmed by the group?

•Are you identifying "intertextuality"--is your writing and reading influencing others' writing and reading?

•Is working with your peers helpful to you in this process?
Why or why not?

Reflective Questioning
Cross-Content

•Why are we doing this?

•Why is this important?

•Did you have a topic in mind to write about before you came today?

•Did you think about the writing you would do in class while you were not here?

•What does this tell you about how you learn?

•How did you choose the topic you wrote about?
(Discussion follows which prompts them to think about how they selected a topic. This strategy is repeated periodically because the learners' strategies in choosing topics will change and evolve.)

•Did you learn something or clarify something you did not know you knew so clearly until you discovered it through writing (Murray, 1984)?

•How did audience response influence your thinking?

•As a participant in a "community of learners," are you sensing that some of your interests and strengths are being identified and affirmed by the group?

•Are you identifying "intertextuality"--is your writing and reading influencing others' writing and reading?

•Is working with your peers helpful to you in this process?
Why or why not?

STYLE PRE-ASSESSMENT

___ I believe I have valuable knowledge to share.
___ I want clear guidelines and objectives for the college class.
___ I have some ideas about what I need to learn from this class.
___ I believe the professor has the most important content to deliver.
___ I would like to discover some of the content information myself.
___ The professor is the expert that I should not question.
___ I especially like reading the textbook and taking tests.
___ I like to be actively engaged in the learning.
___ I prefer listening and taking notes.
___ I like having a draft of a paper critiqued by the professor and then finishing the final copy.
___ I prefer handing in the final paper for grading.
___ I like to be told what to do, when it is due and exactly what the limitations are.
___ I don't mind schedule changes.
___ I prefer to know exactly when everything is due and every activity will occur.
___ I like deadlines.
___ I like everything I hand in to be graded.
___ I like using the textbook for a resource along with lots of other sources.
___ I am comfortable being asked to create my own products.
___ I work very well amid flexible structure.
___ I like to participate in class.
___ I prefer small classes with student who learn together.
___ I am comfortable in large classes where I am solely responsible for the coursework.

Characteristics of IDEAL STUDENT

___ a. _____

___ b. _____

___ c. _____

___ d. _____

___ e. _____

___ f. _____

___ g. _____

___ h. _____

___ i. _____

___ j. _____

Characteristics of POOR STUDENT

___ a. _____

___ b. _____

___ c. _____

___ d. _____

___ e. _____

___ f. _____

___ g. _____

___ h. _____

___ i. _____

___ j. _____

Characteristics of IDEAL TEACHER

___ a. _____

___ b. _____

___ c. _____

___ d. _____

___ e. _____

___ f. _____

___ g. _____

___ h. _____

___ i. _____

___ j. _____

Characteristics of POOR TEACHER

___ a. _____

___ b. _____

___ c. _____

___ d. _____

___ e. _____

___ f. _____

___ g. _____

___ h. _____

___ i. _____

___ j. _____

Strategies for Modifying Mismatches of Teaching and Learning Styles

1. Learning Teams
2. Learning Logs
3. Focused Reflections
   - In-process journals
   - "Where-We-Are" documents/ rear window views
   - Reflection journals/ reflective questioning
   - Walking journals
   - Orienting reflections
4. Peer/Group/Self/Teacher Evaluation
5. Modified Syllabus and Calendar
6. Multi-modal Assignments

Appendix B

FEEDBACK SHEET

1. The best thing about today was . . . . . .

2. I'm wondering about . . . . .

3. Something that really made me think was . . . . .

4. Something that I really felt strong about today was . . .

5. One idea I'll try in student teaching or my classroom is . . . . .

6. I wish in the next town meeting we could discuss . . . . .